

PUNISHER

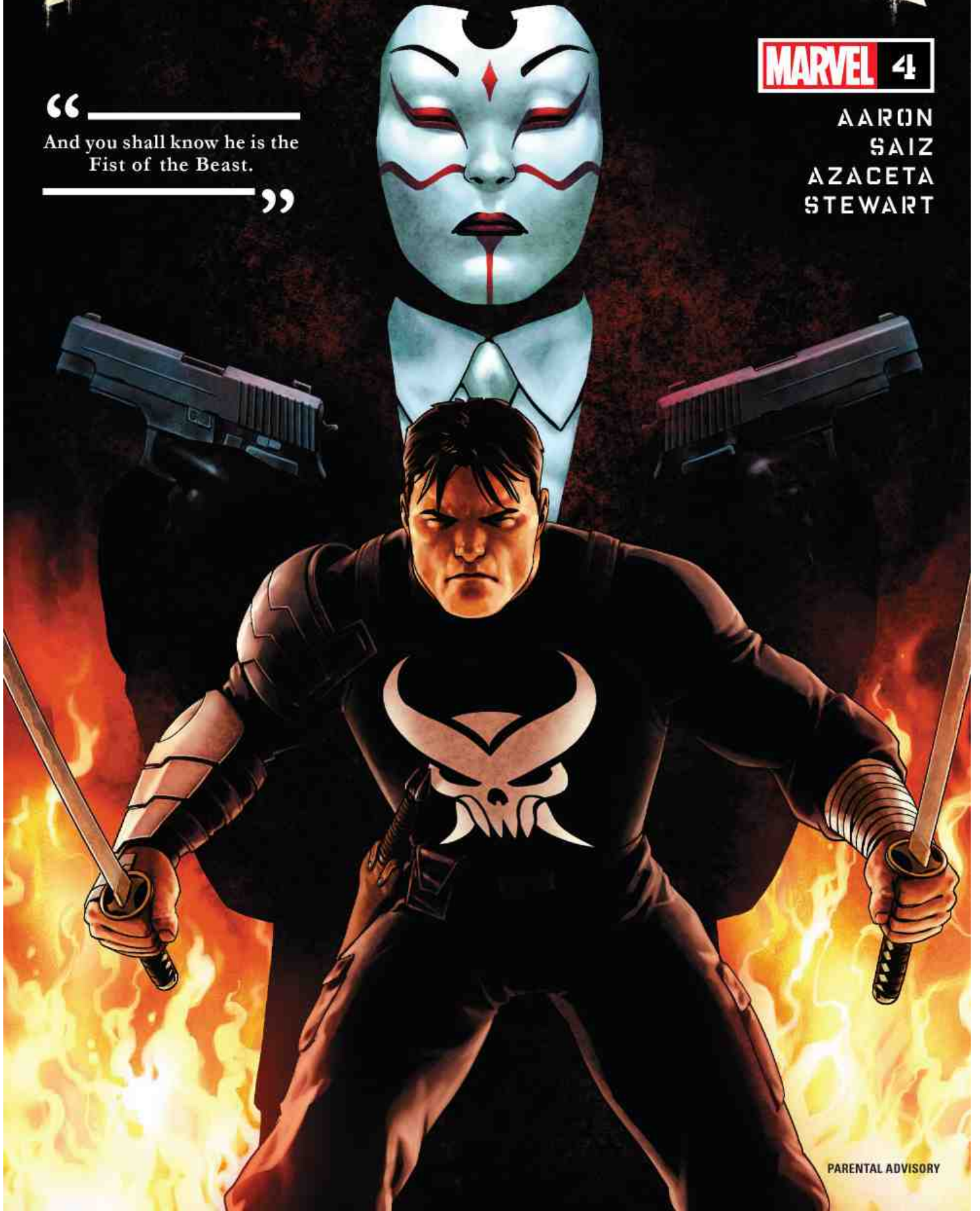
“

And you shall know he is the
Fist of the Beast.

”

MARVEL 4

AARON
SAIZ
AZACETA
STEWART



PARENTAL ADVISORY



NEAL ADAMS 1941-2022

"Neal Adams was both an unstoppable force and an immovable object. The world just lost an amazing artist, a brilliant storyteller, a wild creative force of nature and a man who forever changed the comics medium and the culture of entertainment. I lost all of that, as well as a father figure, mentor and friend."

— BILL SIENKIEWICZ

Marvel celebrates the life of artist Neal Adams who passed away April 28, 2022. His photorealistic style caused a seismic change in comic book art in the 1960s. At DC, he drew headline characters such as Batman and Superman and struck new ground with writer Dennis O'Neil in the socially relevant *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* series. At Marvel, his work with Roy Thomas on both *X-Men* and the "Kree/Skrull War" in *Avengers* has had a lasting influence on the Marvel Universe. Adams also made an impact through his mentorship of new artists and the innovative work of his Continuity studio. Adams' influence cannot be overstated.



FRANK!

TURN
THAT CRAP
DOWN!

THERE WAS A *DRUM SET* IN THE
CORNER HE HADN'T TOUCHED IN
YEARS. THAT HE NEVER REALLY
LEARNED HOW TO PLAY.

NUNCHUCKS FROM WHEN
HE TOOK KARATE LESSONS
FOR A COUPLE OF WEEKS
BEFORE QUITTING.

PARTS SCATTERED ABOUT
FOR A *MOTORCYCLE* HE
NEVER FINISHED BUILDING.

THE EMPTY CAGE
FOR A *SNAKE* HE
COULD NEVER
REMEMBER TO FEED.

AT SCHOOL, HE SPENT
MORE TIME *FIGHTING*
IN THE HALLS THAN
SITTING IN CLASS.

HE HAD NO FRIENDS.
PAID NO ATTENTION
TO GIRLS. SUSTAINED
NO HOBBIES.

NOTHING SEEMED TO
HOLD FRANK CASTLE'S
INTEREST FOR LONG.

HE WAS 15 YEARS OLD AND
IN NEED OF *SOMETHING*
HE COULDN'T SEEM TO FIND.

SOMETHING TO
MAKE HIM BELIEVE
HE WAS *HUMAN*.

THAT THERE WAS A
PLACE AND A *PURPOSE*
FOR HIM IN THE WORLD.

SOMETHING
HE HAD YET
TO ACCEPT...



AFTER RETIRED MARINE FRANK CASTLE'S WIFE AND CHILDREN WERE KILLED BY STRAY GUNFIRE DURING A SHOOT-OUT IN CENTRAL PARK, HE BEGAN A ONE-MAN VIGILANTE WAR ON CRIME. ARMED WITH A VAST ARSENAL AND GRIM DETERMINATION, HE BECAME THE...

PUNISHER

THE CULT OF ASSASSINS KNOWN AS THE HAND MADE FRANK CASTLE AN OFFER HE COULDN'T REFUSE: BECOME THEIR HIGH SLAYER IN EXCHANGE FOR THE RESURRECTION OF HIS LONG-DEAD WIFE, MARIA. FRANK IS JUST ONE IN A LONG LINE OF FABLED FISTS OF THE BEAST, THE HAND HAVING OBSERVED HIM SINCE HIS EARLY CHILDHOOD. FRANK NOW USES THE HAND'S RESOURCES TO COMBAT THE WORLD'S EVILDOERS, INCLUDING A CULT OF WARMONGERS LED BY THE GOD ARES.

FRANK RESIDES IN THE HAND'S FORTRESS IN JAPAN ALONG WITH MARIA, WHOSE MEMORY OF THEIR TRAGIC PAST REMAINS SHROUDED AND UNSTABLE. BUT WHILE THE HAND REVIVED MARIA, THEY HAVE NOT RESURRECTED FRANK AND MARIA'S DECEASED CHILDREN...YET.

THE KING OF KILLERS

Book ONE, Chapter FOUR

"THE WAY OF THE PUNISHER"

by JASON AARON, JESÚS SAIZ & PAUL AZACETA

color artist DAVE STEWART *letterer* VC's CORY PETIT

JESÚS SAIZ

cover artist

production design
NICK RUSSELL

assistant editor
MARTIN BIRO

associate editor
ANNALISE BISSA

editor
TOM BREVOORT

editor in chief
C.B. CEBULSKI







WHAT
CRIME HAVE THEY
COMMITTED?

THE MOST
DESPICABLE
KIND.

THEY CAME
CRAWLING BACK
THIS MORNING, THE
ONLY SURVIVORS FROM
THE RAID ON THE
GOD OF WAR'S
ACROPOLIS.

ARES LEFT
THEM ALIVE AS
A LIVING INSULT
TO THE HAND.



SURVIVING
A MASSACRE IS
NOT A CRIME.

TELL YOUR
HIGH SLAYER
WHAT THE WAR
GOD MADE
YOU DO.

HE TORE
THE OTHERS APART
WITH HIS BARE HANDS.
OUR BLADES WERE
USELESS AGAINST--



TELL
HIM!



ARES
MADE US...
KNEEL BEFORE
HIM.

KNEEL IN
THE BLOOD OF
OUR COMRADES.
AND HE...

...HE
MADE US
PRAY.



"ARES MADE US
PRAY TO HIM.

"PRAY
FOR OUR LIVES.

"PRAY
FOR WAR.

"HE MADE US...
TURN OUR BACKS
ON THE BEAST."

THAT'S
IT?

GET UP
AND GET BACK
TO WORK.

I DON'T
KILL ANYONE
BECAUSE OF
WHO THEY
PRAY TO.

YES, OF
COURSE, YOU'RE
RIGHT. THEY HAVEN'T
EARNED A DEATH AT
THE HANDS OF THE
PUNISHER.

THEY MUST
TAKE THEIR
OWN LIVES.



THEY MUST
WASH THE FEET
OF THEIR HONORED
LORD WITH THE
WATERY BLOOD FROM
THEIR **GUTLESS**
BELLIES!

STOP.



WE NEED
ALL THE MEN
WE HAVE.

THESE
THINGS ARE
NOT MEN! THEY
ARE DOGS!

WE'LL
NEED DOGS
TOO.



IF I HAVE
LEARNED ANYTHING
IN MY MANY YEARS OF
BLESSED SLAUGHTER,
SEARCHING FOR THE ONE
TRUE **FIST OF THE**
BEAST, SEARCHING
FOR YOU...

...IT IS THAT
MEN AND DOGS
ARE MUCH THE SAME.
THEY WILL ALWAYS
FAIL YOU.

YOU NEED...
SOMETHING
MORE.



YOU NEED
WARRIORS WORTHY
OF YOUR NAME.

THOSE WHO
BREATHE THE
BLOOD OF OTHERS.
WHO DREAM IN RED
AND RAGE.

TRULY
INSATIABLE
DISCIPLES OF
THE BEAST. JUST
LIKE YOU, LORD
HIGH SLAYER.

YOU NEED
MASTERS IN THE
WAY OF THE
PUNISHER.



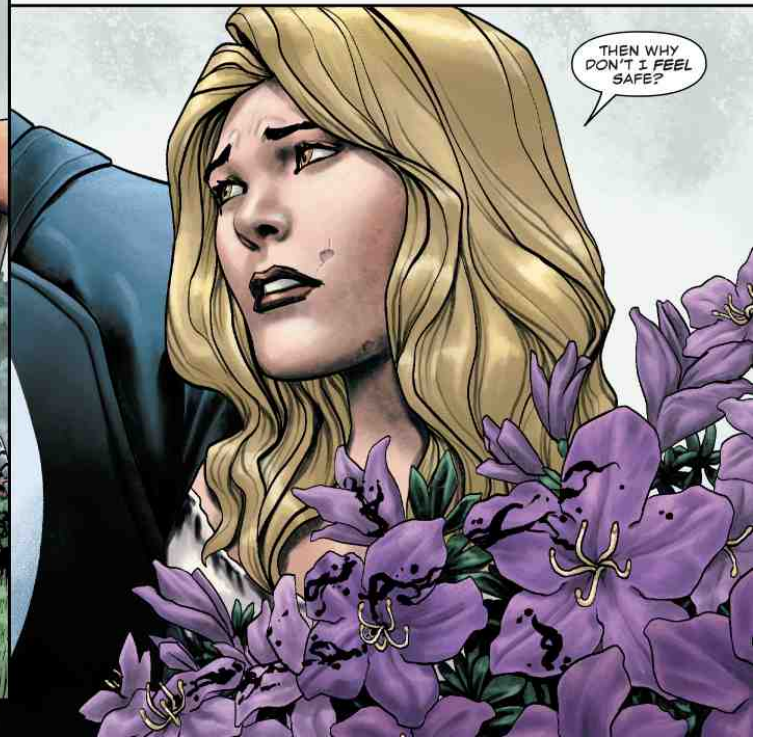
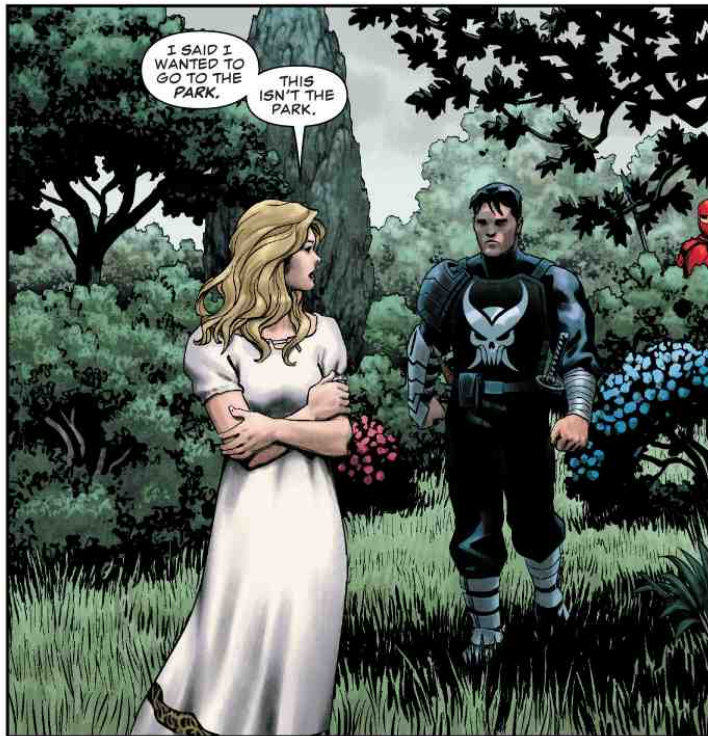
AND THEY
CAN ONLY LEARN
THIS ART FROM YOU,
OH MIGHTY FIST. THE
WORLD'S MOST
ACCOMPLISHED
LIVING LIFE TAKER.

YOU MUST
FORGE THE
WARRIORS OF THE
HAND IN YOUR OWN
BLOOD-DRENCHED
IMAGE.

INTO
UNSTOPPABLE,
UNRELENTING,
UNWAVERING...

...MACHINES
OF MASS
MURDER.





THE PREVIOUS NIGHT.



YOU HAVE
NO RIGHT TO
HOLD THAT
SWORD!



YOU DON'T
DESERVE TO
DIE WITH IT IN
YOUR HAND!

BUT YOU
WILL!

YOUR GUARDS
ARE DEAD, "LORD
PUNISHER"!

PREPARE
TO JOIN THEM
IN THE BELLY OF
THE BEAST!



HE HAD
FORGOTTEN
WHAT IT WAS
LIKE.



BUT BY
GIVING HIM WHAT
HE NEEDED TO COME
TO OUR SIDE, I HAVE
INADVERTENTLY HELPED
FRANK CASTLE TO
REMEMBER...WHAT IT
IS TO KNOW
FEAR.

HE IS A
CHILD AGAIN,
FRIGHTENED OF WHAT
HE MIGHT BECOME,
OF WHAT HE KNOWS
HE MUST.



ARES IS
A YOUNG GOD
COMPARED TO YOU,
ALMIGHTY DEVOURER.
BUT STILL POWERFUL
ENOUGH TO DESTROY
THESE BLOODY WORKS
WE DO IN YOUR NAME
JUST AS THEY'VE
BEGUN.

ONLY YOUR
FIST CAN LEAD THE
WAY. UNENCUMBERED
BY FEAR. FULLY SANCTIFIED
WITH THE GIFTS OF YOUR
UNHOLY SPIRIT.



AND THE
HAND MUST
BE READY TO
FOLLOW.

CAPABLE OF
MORE MIRACLES
OF DEPRAVITY THAN
EVER BEFORE.

SHOW
ME, OH
UNHALLOWED,
HELLISH
FATHER...

SHOW ME
HOW TO FLOOD
THE STREETS OF THIS
WORLD WITH CARNAGE
THE LIKES OF WHICH
IT'S NEVER SEEN.

SHOW ME
THE WAY TO
THY RED
HEAVEN.

MADRIPOOR.

IT APPEARS
TO HAVE
GONE QUITE
SPLENDIDLY,
SIR.

BOTH FACTIONS
EFFECTIVELY DEPLOYED
THE WEAPONS WE GAVE
THEM ON CREDIT.

BANNER
CANNONS
AND CAR-FIRING
GRAVITON
BAZOOKAS.

FIVE
SQUARE BLOCKS
WERE LEVELED IN ONE
AFTERNOON, WITH
IMPRESSIVE CASUALTY
NUMBERS.

ALL FROM A
BATTLE OF LOWTOWN
STREET GANGS THAT
NORMALLY WOULD'VE BEEN
SETTLED WITH BROKEN
BOTTLES AND
SWITCHBLADES.

YOUR BLESSINGS
UNTO THE EARTH ARE
INDEED MAKING IT A MORE
GLORIOUS WORLD, LORD
GENERAL ARES.

MORE
GLORIOUS
FOR HUMAN
WARFARE.

HMPH.



WHEN ONE TRIBE OF EARTH-APES FIRST THREW **STONES** AT ANOTHER IN ANGER...

...I DESCENDED FROM OLYMPUS... TO SHOW THEM HOW TO **SHARPEN THEIR ROCKS**.

THAT IS MY TRUE NATURE.



WHenever I have tried, over the eons, to be something **OTHER** than the greatest of all war-mongers...

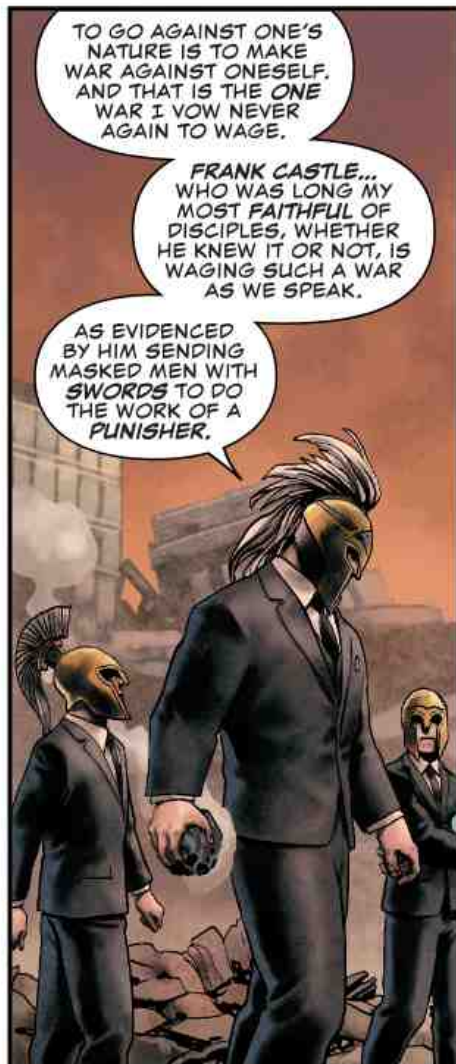
...A father, an avenger, a fool going on about butterflies in the fields of Elysium...

...I have been left... wanting and unwell.



AS SHARKS MUST SWIM AND FALCONS MUST FLY AND MAN MUST MATE AND MURDER...

...SO ARES MUST CASK THE BOLD, RED WINES OF WAR.



TO GO AGAINST ONE'S NATURE IS TO MAKE WAR AGAINST ONESELF. AND THAT IS THE **ONE** WAR I VOW NEVER AGAIN TO WAGE.

FRANK CASTLE... WHO WAS LONG MY MOST FAITHFUL OF DISCIPLES, WHETHER HE KNEW IT OR NOT, IS WAGING SUCH A WAR AS WE SPEAK.

AS EVIDENCED BY HIM SENDING MASKED MEN WITH **SWORDS** TO DO THE WORK OF A **PUNISHER**.



SOMETHING HAS WITHERED WITHIN HIM.

PERHAPS HE DREAMS OF LEAVING BEHIND THE GREAT BLOODY **VINEYARDS** THAT GAVE HIM LIFE, OF TURNING HIS BACK ON THE ETERNAL BATTLE.

BUT I AM **ARES**, AND I SPEAK FOR THAT WHICH CANNOT SPEAK FOR ITSELF.



I SPEAK FOR WAR.

AND WAR SAYS **NAY**.



SUCH A WHOLESOME SIGHT. DON'T BOTHER GETTING UP.



JUST KEEP PRAYING.

ARES! YOU DARE DEFILE THE TEMPLE OF THE BEAST?!

HMM, SMELLS RATHER DEFILED ALREADY.

PRAYER IS SUCH A LOST ART, DON'T YOU THINK? PERHAPS BECAUSE THE GODS STOPPED BOTHERING TO ANSWER THEM SO LONG AGO.



I SUPPOSE I DID TOO FOR A TIME, AND WHAT DID THAT GIVE US?

WARS FOUGHT WITH DRONES AND SOLDIERS SITTING BEHIND COMPUTERS. SHAMEFUL.

BUT NOW I'M WHERE I BELONG-- DOING MY PART TO REMIND MAN OF HIS TRUE NATURE, ONE SHARPENED STONE AT A TIME.



AH, I DO APPRECIATE THE MURDEROUS GESTURE, BUT I'M ONLY HERE IN SPIRIT FORM, INTERCEPTING YOUR PRAYER.

JUST WANTED TO MAKE CERTAIN SOMEONE FROM THE GREAT BEYOND WAS HEARING YOUR LOVELY PLEAS FOR WAR.



BECAUSE FROM THE LOOKS OF HIM, THE ONLY SOUND YOUR GOD HEARS IS THE DINNER BELL.

DO MORTALS REALLY FIND THIS SORT OF VISAGE FRIGHTENING? HOW COULD HE POSSIBLY CAUSE ANYONE HARM? BY FALLING ON THEM?

HE LOOKS LIKE HE'D GET WINDED TRYING TO SCRATCH HIS OWN BEHIND.

GOD OR NO GOD, YOU WILL PAY FOR THIS **BLASPHEMY**, OLYMPIAN.

BLASPHEMY, I'M GLAD YOU BROUGHT THAT UP, PRIESTESS. IT REMINDS ME OF HOW YOU'VE BEEN BUSY **DESECRATING** MY HOLIEST OF PARTHENONS.

THAT GRAND CATHEDRAL OF **COMBAT SAVAGERY** KNOWN AS THE PUNISHER.



YOU FEAR HIM.

YOU MISTAKE **DISGUST** FOR FEAR, WOMAN. **DISGUST** FOR WHATEVER YOU'VE DONE THAT HAS HIM **HIDING** BEHIND A WALL OF NINJA.

REST ASSURED, HE WILL COME FOR YOU. WHEN HE'S READY.



THE PUNISHER I KNEW WAS ALWAYS READY. JUST GIVE HIM A GUN OR A KNIFE OR A RUSTY SCREWDRIVER AND YOU'VE GOT YOURSELF SOME BLOODSHED.

YOU ARE TAMPERING WITH **PERFECTION** FOR YOUR OWN PETTY ENDS. AND I'M TELLING YOU... FROM ONE GOD TO...

...WHATEVER THE HELL YOU ARE...TO **STOP**, STOP FORCING FRANK CASTLE TO BETRAY HIS TRUE SELF.



OR THE NEXT TIME YOU SEE ME, I WILL NOT BE IN SPIRIT FORM.

AND THE PILE OF **CORPSES** I LEAVE IN YOUR CITADEL WILL BE EVEN MORE **VOLUMINOUS** THAN YOUR FAT, SLIMY @&##% OF A GOD.



IF YOU DO NOT SEE THE TRUTH IN WHAT I DO... THEN YOU KNOW **NOTHING** OF FRANK CASTLE.

HE ISN'T BETRAYING HIS TRUE SELF. HE **EMBRACES** IT AS NEVER BEFORE.

AND EVEN AS WE SPEAK, THE PUNISHER GROWS MORE **POWERFUL** THAN YOU COULD POSSIBLY IMAGINE.









AT LEAST
HAVE THE DIGNITY
TO DIE THE RIGHT
WAY.



HOW HAVE
YOU DONE THIS, WITCH?
HOW COULD YOU POSSIBLY
CONVINCE THE PUNISHER TO
SERVE AS WARLORD OF
THE HAND?

WHY DID HE
NOT PUT A BULLET
IN YOUR SICKLY OLD
FACE THE MOMENT
YOU CAME TO
HIM?

I HAVE
ONLY SHOWN HIM
THE BEAUTIFUL AND
BLOODY TRUTH
WITHIN HIMSELF.

OH,
HE WOULD
ABSOLUTELY SHOOT
YOU FOR SAYING
SOMETHING LIKE
THAT.

YOU'RE PLAYING
TRICKS WITH HIS
MIND, IMPLANTING
MEMORIES, SOME
SORT OF ANCIENT
HAND MAGIC.



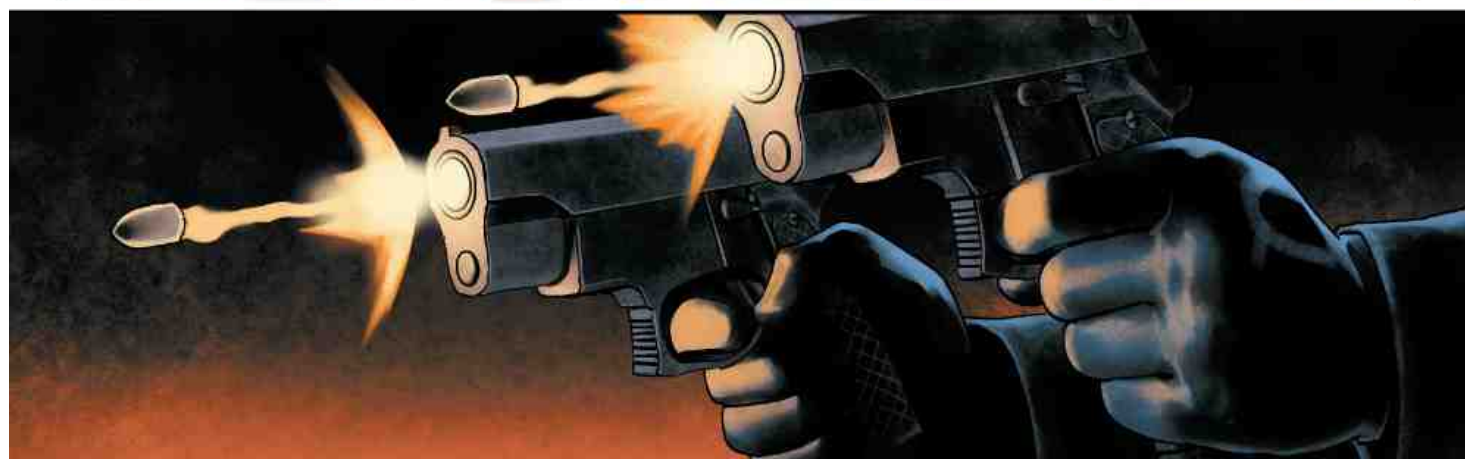
HE HAS
BEEN ATTACKED
THIS NIGHT.

BY ASSASSINS
WHO'VE SERVED
THE HAND IN THE PAST.
LADY BULLSEYE AND
LORD DEATHSTRIKE.

WELL, THERE
IS NO WAY HE'LL
SURVIVE THAT ATTACK
BY WAVING AROUND A
NINJA SWORD.

PLEASE TELL ME
HE'S ABOUT TO
BECOME HIS OLD
SELF AGAIN.

YES...
HE IS.





"HE SHALL BE BLESSED
WITH EYES FROM WHICH
NO SIN CAN HIDE.



"HE SHALL MOUNT
UP WITH WINGS AS
SWIFT AS RAGE.

"WITH THE STRENGTH
OF EVERY MAN WHO
HAS EVER MURDERED.

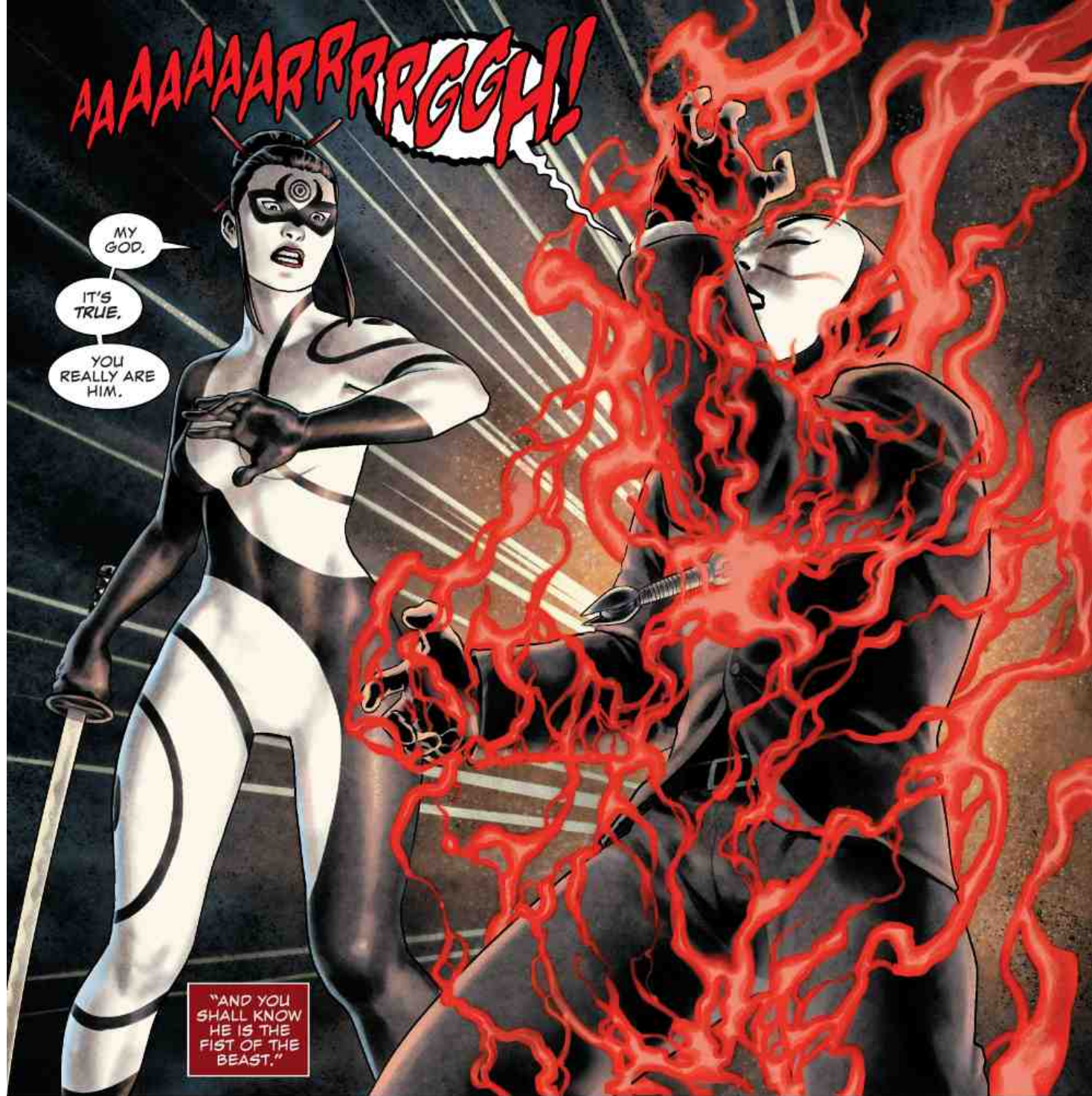


"HE SHALL BURN
BUT BE NOT
CONSUMED.



"HE SHALL
KILL AND KILL
AND KILL...

"...AND NOT
GROW WEARY."





YOU SENT
THE ASSASSINS
YOURSELF,
DIDN'T YOU?

WHATEVER
YOU'RE TRYING
TO TURN HIM INTO, I
WON'T LET IT HAPPEN.
I'D RATHER PREPARE
A PLACE OF HONOR
FOR HIM IN
HADES.

IF YOU'LL
EXCUSE ME, I
MUST RETURN TO
MY PRAYERS. SOME
GODS STILL HAVE
BELIEVERS IN
THIS WORLD.



HOW DID
YOU DO IT,
WITCH?!

WHAT
DID YOU
STEAL FROM
CASTLE?!



"OR WHAT
DID YOU
PROMISE
HIM?!"

FRANK?
WHAT WAS
THAT FIRE?

IT'S
NOTHING,
MARIA. GO
BACK TO
BED.



I'VE
GIVEN HIM
NOTHING.

BUT THE
BEAST SHALL
GIVE HIM
EVERYTHING.

THE
EYES, THE
FIRE, AND ALL OF
THE FIVE DARK
GIFTS.

AND THEN
THE PUNISHER
WILL COME FOR
YOU, ARES.





IT'S NOT EASY TO
GROW UP AS A CHILD
OF THE BEAST.

GUHGN!



TO STAY
COMMITTED
TO SUCH AN
ARDUOUS AND
DEMANDING
PATH.

ESPECIALLY WITH
SO MANY SOFT AND
HONEY-SWEET
TEMPTATIONS
ALONG THE WAY.



ANY ONE OF THEM
COULD PROVE THE
ANTIDOTE TO ALL THE
GUT-CHURNING POISONS
ONE MUST CHOKE DOWN
TO SERVE THE BEAST.



CASTLE!
GET YOUR HEAD
IN THE GAME!



BUT OUR LORD
SOMETIMES WORKS
IN MIGHTY AND
MYSTERIOUS WAYS.



MARIA?
YOU ALL
RIGHT?

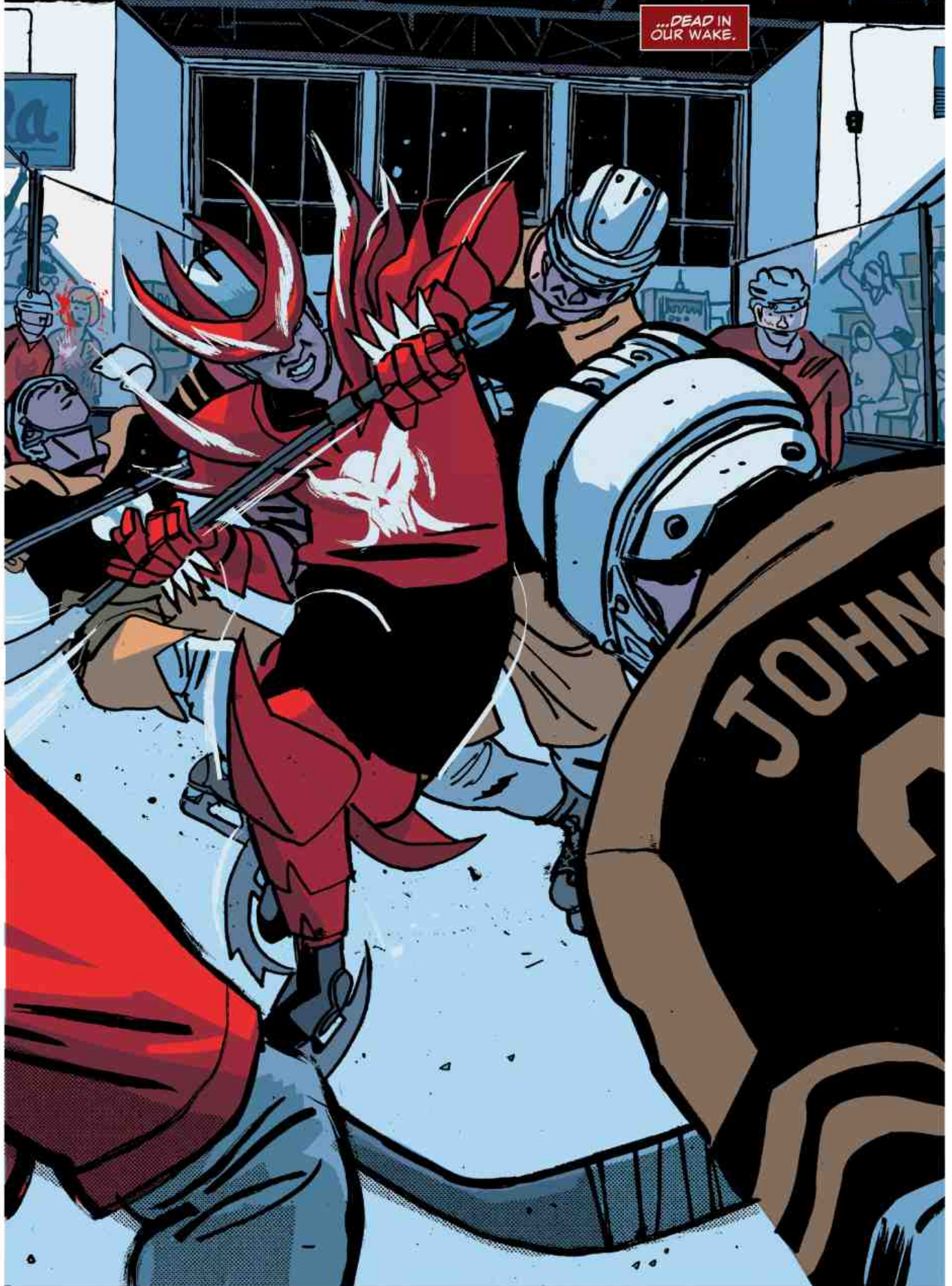
WHO WAS
THAT?

AND HE MIGHT
PRESENT US
WITH SUCH A
CHALLENGE...

...SO THAT WE
MAY SHOW OUR
STRENGTH...

...BY LEAVING
THAT LOVELY
TEMPTATION...

...DEAD IN
OUR WAKE.





CAN I AT LEAST COME WITH YOU THIS TIME?



I HAVEN'T BEEN OUTSIDE THIS PLACE IN...I DON'T EVEN KNOW HOW LONG.

I'LL ONLY BE GONE A SHORT WHILE.



FOR YOUR WORK?

YES.

WHAT IS IT YOU DO FOR WORK AGAIN?



I CAN REMEMBER YOU LEAVING HOME ONCE...TO GO OFF AND FIGHT A WAR.

ARE YOU STILL A SOLDIER, FRANK?



GO TO SLEEP, MARIA.

BY THE TIME YOU WAKE UP, MY WORK WILL BE FINISHED.

HOPEFULLY, FOR GOOD.









NEXT:

PUNISHER

#

5



IS THE PUNISHER TRULY THE FIST OF THE BEAST AND THE PREDESTINED HIGH SLAYER OF THE HAND? OR IS HE NOTHING MORE THAN A PRISONER OF THEIR LIES? BECAUSE IF THERE'S ONE THING FRANK CASTLE HAS NEVER BEEN PARTICULARLY GOOD AT BEING...IT'S A PRISONER.

